BALTIMORE CLOSES INTERNATIONAL SEASON IN A BLAZE OF GLORY

BEHIND THE MASK

The Story of an Umpire Who Had a Heart

By CHARLES E. VAN LOAN

CHAPTER I.

THE umpire is, as a general thing, a human being.

He has the same leanings toward friendly intercourse with his fellows, the same universal desire for approbation, the same hopes, the same ambitions, the same sorrows which stir his more fortunate brethern; but if he is a good umpire he will button all these things carefully underneath his blue serge jacket before he walks out upon the field.

Con O'Higgins was an umpire of the old school—praise be, there are still a few of them left, even though we howl because their eyesight is not what it once was.

"You can't be one of the boys and an umpire at the same time," remarked Mr. Cornelius O'Higgins.

Con O'Higgins decided that he would never make the error of becoming too friendly with the boys; consequently, he did not seem to know the first name of any man in any league. It was "Mister This" and "Mister That" with Con at all times, and a ballplayer is apt to hesitate before walloping an umpire who always addresses him as "Mister." That sort of emotional insanity is likely to come quite high, and it was Con's idea to make familiarity so expensive that few could afford to indulge in it.

O'Higgins owed his big league appointment to one man—the Captain and manager of the toughest fighting club in the league. This man knew Con, had seen him work on several occasions and believed that he had the makings of a great umpire, so he mentioned the fact in the proper quarters, and Cornelius O'Higgins came on to the big town for his tryout.

Con did not know it, but the league President had two scouts in the grand stand on the day of his initial appearance. They were on hand to note the attitude of the fighting captain-manager, whom we will disguise as Bill Shertliff, toward the bush umpire whom he had recommended.

Bill had a reputation himself, mostly bad, when it came to dealings with

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umpires. Bill was a fright when it came to handling the poor, miserable judge of play; a bulldozer, a bluffer, a loud talker, a button snatcher and a nose puller. And the boss of the league was quite naturally interested in getting a line on the attitude of Bill Shertliff toward the umpire whom he had made, and vice versa. It would be just like Bill to "try to own O'Higgins from the jump."

Con's first big league game took place on Bill Shertliff's home grounds. Now, in those days there was a strict rule forbidding the pitcher to "warm up" or throw the ball about in practice while in the box. Bill Shertliff was forced to jump a cold pitcher into the game, and the manager instructed this pitcher to "warm up" before delivering a ball to the batter.

"Don't do that," said Con, warningly. "You know the rules, Shertliff."

The genial manager cursed the rules and yelled: "Go ahead and throw that ball!"

"Hold on!" said O'Higgins. "If he throws that ball it will cost him ten, and it will cost you twenty-five, Shertliff!"

"Pay no attention to this new umpire," said Shertliff. "He's just in from Dubuque and he's got funny notions. Throw the ball!"

The pitcher delivered the ball, and it was returned. Shertliff signalled him to continue.

"Wait!" said O'Higgins. "Every ball he throws now will cost him twenty-five and you one hundred. Throw as many as you like, because this fine is going to stand!"

To make a long story short, O'Higgins's only friend in the big league paid into the treasury the sum of $125 for warming up one pitcher, and it cost the pitcher $110 to be warmed, which, it is presumed, Shertliff paid. Shertliff was too stubborn to quit, but four pitched balls were about all he was willing to stand after the price went up to a century each.

After the game he crossed over behind O'Higgins and whispered something in his ear.

"You're all right, feller," said Bill Shertliff. "But I had to get that pitcher warm, and I'm willing to pay for it. You're some umpire."

And that was exactly what the scouts reported to the head of the league. That great man roared with delight when he learned that Shertliff's own umpire had fined him $125 in his very first game, and the President wisely decided that he need have no fear that the new man would allow his judgment to be shaded by the fact that Shertliff had got him the job.

Later, Con Higgins decided that fining ball players was a poor way to enforce discipline. He began sending men to the clubhouse, and putting scrappy players out of games. They preferred the fines, but Con had it figured out in his own mind that punishing a ball player's wife by taking her husband's money away was not exactly fair to the wife.

They were not long in finding out that O'Higgins could jerk his thumb toward the clubhouse in nine different languages. You may fine a ball player $50 and he will forgive you; but if you put him out of a close game he will remember it from one end of the season to the other.

Before the new man had officiated in a dozen games he had established himself as an umpire of big-league timber.

It was no use trying to scare him. The old Gamecocks tried it once—put on their famous mob scene, with the full strength of the company. O'Higgins pointed toward the club house until their infield was riddled like a sieve, and the Gamecocks finished that game with five pitchers in the line-up and were beautifully walloped in consequence.

The managers screamed, some of the partisan fans roared for O'Higgins's blood; but the great public at large—which is generally fair, no matter what any one may say—respected the new umpire, while appreciating the fact that he gave them fast, clean games, free from wrangling and riots.

The league raised his salary and offered him a long-term contract, which he accepted, after cautiously stipulating for a sliding scale of remuneration.

In words of a few syllables and for a summing up of the whole matter, one might say that Cornelius O'Higgins, big league umpire, said goodby to friendship and chose respect rather than fellowship as the hard, cold foundation upon which to build his career.

From the first week O'Higgins was a mystery.

The ball players never knew which train he took, never knew which hotels he favored with his modest presence. All they knew of him was that he would be on hand in time for the opening of the game, stiff and severe in his plain blue serge uniform.

It was only natural that the shell which O'Higgins built for himself should harden and thicken with the passage of years. The man began denying himself friendship with any one inside the organization which paid him a salary; this self-denial grew into the fixed habit of his life. His taciturn demeanor became a sort of tradition of the league.

Had Con O'Higgins smiled upon the ball field the players would have spread the news from one end of the big circuit to the other. Time made of him a gruff, surly machine, tabulating balls and strikes with a keen eye and rendering his decisions with automaton-like motions of his hands.

CHAPTER II.

DURING the months of play O'Higgins was perhaps the most lonely man who witnessed the games; but if he felt his isolation he never gave any sign.

The President of the League had about two or three talks a year with his star umpire—usually about new rules. Rarely O'Higgins offered a suggestion, but if he did, it was always a good one. The league President depended upon his judgment, and stood behind him in his dealings with managers and players.

The President gained the idea—he never said how—that O'Higgins was a married man. He was certain that mail would reach him during the winter months if addressed to a small Michigan town.

The whole league changed during O'Higgins's tenure of office. The ball players who were the bright stars of the zenith declined and faded away into the minor leagues.

They called him "old" Con, but he was not old, as years go—somewhere between forty and fifty; but he seemed older—and on his weather-beaten countenance there appeared the hard times we sometimes see upon the faces of our judges—the stern carvings of conscious authority.

After Con's tenth year in the big league, the wise young managers and the players began to look for signs of a let-down. Each spring they expected to see "the old man" go to smash on balls and strikes, the crucial test for aged eyes. They expected to see the old hardshell begin to "guess," as the others had done before enforced retirement. They were disappointed. O'Higgins remained the best umpire in the league on balls and strikes, and when it came to "getting on top of a play" on the bases, none of the youngsters could outfoot him.

O'Higgins was not popular. The ball players thought he was too stern, and too fond of showing his authority. They would have been glad to see him give way to a younger man, who might, on occasions, listen to reason, or "stand for" an argument on the field. The crowds had never really loved O'Higgins, because there was nothing about the public side of his character which attracted anything like affection or noisy enthusiasm.

The thirteenth year brought trouble with the umpiring staff. There were three new men to be tried out, and it is a great deal harder to find a good umpire than it is to discover a new left handed pitcher. If you do not believe that, ask the next baseball magnate who happens to run across you in his French touring car.

Do Not Miss To-Morrow's Interesting Instalment.

THE FUSSY FOURSOME - - - - - "Life's Sweetest Thrill"

THE FUSSY FOURSOME, Vic's New Comic, Appears Each Monday in The Evening World. Copy of Each Comic Will Be Reprinted on Hard Paper and Mailed to Evening World Readers on Receipt of a Five-Cent Stamp. You Will Want the Series in Your Home or Your Golf Club. This is the Seventeenth of the Series, the First Having Appeared May 30. Address Sporting Editor, Evening World.

ORIOLES ESTABLISH RECORD OF 119 WINS FOR SEASON

BALTIMORE, Md., Sept. 26.—The Orioles and Jersey City rang down the curtain yesterday in the International League, Jack Dunn's champions handling the Skeeters a double defeat by scores of 8 to 5 and 8 to 7 respectively.

Baltimore has made baseball history this season in President Toole's circuit, closing the season with 119 victories, the most ever scored in a league. The old record was 116, made by the Chicago Cubs in 1906.

In the second game Jack Ogden pitched his thirty-second victory of the year, tying the old mark set by Rube Vickers many years ago in the Eastern League.

Among other feats this year the Orioles tied the record of twenty-seven straight games, won by the Corsicana Club of the Texas League and furnished the chief home run hitter and leading batter of the circuit. Jack Bentley, first baseman and pitcher, led in these departments, his clubmate, Fritz Maisel, being second to him in batting.

The Orioles will engage the Detroit Tigers to-day and to-morrow in two exhibition games, and after playing the International League All-Stars a trio of contests will leave for the West to engage the pennant winner of the American Association, which will probably be Louisville, in the "Little World's Series" championship.

FINAL STANDING IN INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE.

Clubs.	W.	L.	PC.	Clubs.	W.	L.	PC.
Balto..	119	47	.720	Newark	72	92	.439
Roch'r	100	68	.595	Syrac'e	71	96	.425
Buffalo	99	69	.593	J. City	59	106	.358
Toronto	89	77	.536	Read'g	56	110	.337

Schiff Winning Until He Hurt Both Hands.

At the Ridgewood S. C. on Saturday night Sammy Schiff had to stop in the eleventh round of an exciting bout with Al McRae. Up to sixth round Schiff was winning easily, but he hurt both hands in that round. He refused to quit and continued without being able to fight back. The house was sold out at 8 o'clock. The boys were rematched for Oct. 15.